

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 5137

E.

O. 11652 GDS

TAGS PINT PINS MILI VS

SUBJECT: CEASEFIRE AND POLITICAL SPOT REPORT MR 1: QUANG NGAI

POW RELEASE, MARCH 25, 1973

FOLLOWING MSG REC FROM AMCONSUL DANANG ACTION AMEMBASSY SAIGON
ON MAR 28 REPEATED FOR YOUR INFO:

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EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, VS

SUBJ: CEASEFIRE AND POLITICAL SPOT REPORT MR I: QUANG NGAI

POW RELEASE, MARCH 25, 1973

THE FOLLOWING REPORT ON THE POW RELEASE IN QUANG NGAI PROVINCE
MARCH 25, WAS PREPARED BY THE QUANG NGAI POLOFF:

SUMMARY: RELEASE OF 200 POWS IN SOUTHERN QUANG NGAI, THOUGH
SLIGHTLY DELAYED BY LAST MINUTE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN PRG AND
GVN OFFICIALS, TOOK PLACE AS SCHEDULED MARCH 25. RELEASE WAS
MARRED, HOWEVER, WHEN VNAF CHINOOK ENROUTE FROM RELEASE POINT
TO QUANG NGAI AIRPORT WITH FIRST LOAD OF RETURNEES WAS HIT BY
GROUND FIRE WHICH WOUNDED ONE HELICOPTER CREWMAN. A BREAKDOWN
IN COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN ICCS MEMBERS IN DANANG AND SAIGON
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ALMOST PREVENTED SAIGON ICCS DELEGATION FROM REACHING RELEASE SITE. AMONG THOSE RELEASED WAS AN RVN MARINE LIEUTENANT HELD PRISONER FOR EIGHT YEARS IN A CAMP IN SOUTHERN NGHIA HANH DISTRICT WHERE AT ONE TIME THERE WAS ALSO TWELVE US POWS WHO WERE LATER TAKEN NORTH. END SUMMARY.

1. FPJMC MEMBERS FROM SAIGON ARRIVED QUANG NGAI AIRPORT SHORTLY AFTER 0800 HOURS WHERE THEY WERE JOINED BY JMT PERSONNEL FROM DANANG AND CHU LAI AND FLOWN BY HELICOPTER TO RELEASE POINT. ICCS DELEGATES FROM SAIGON, UNAWARE OF LAST MINUTE SCHEDULING CHANGE, FLEW FIRST TO DUC PHO. THEY FINALLY ARRIVED QUANG NGAI AIRPORT SHORTLY BEFORE NOON, ONLY TO FIND THAT NO ARRANGEMENTS HAD BEEN MADE TO TRANSPORT THEM TO THE RELEASE POINT. HOWEVER, OWING TO THE TIME REQUIRED TO NEGOTIATE LAST MINUTE PRG PROCEDURAL STIPULATIONS, FINAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE RELEASE WERE NOT COMPLETED UNTIL NOON. ICCS DELEGATION WAS ABLE TO OBTAIN PERMISSION FROM DRV/ PRG REPRESENTATIVES TO FLY TO RELEASE POINT IN FPJMC HELICOPTERS AND ARRIVED IN TIME TO WITNESS THE LOADING OF THE FIRST GROUP OF GETURNEES.

2. FIRST GROUP OF POWS ARRIVED QUANG NGAI AIRPORT ABOUT 1320 HOURS BY VNAF CHINOOK. A SECOND CHINOOK WHICH WAS ALREADY ENROUTE TO RELEASE POINT TO PICK UP SECOND LOAD OF PRISONERS WAS ORDERED BACK TO QUANG NGAI AFTER IT WAS LEARNED THAT THE FIRST CHINOOK HAD BEEN FIRED UPON. AFTER A MOMENTARY DELAY, GVN OFFICIALS DECIDED TO PROCEED WITH THE RELEASE DESPITE THE INCIDENT AND THE SECOND CHINOOK ONCE AGAIN TOOK OFF FOR DUC PHO.

3. KOREAN POW WAS AMONG FIRST TO DISEMBARK. HE WAS NET BY THREE OFFICIALS FROM THE KOREAN EMBASSY AND WHISKED AWAY TO A WAITING U-21 FOR HIS RETURN TO SAIGON. THE FIRST GROUP OF 49 RVN RELEASEES, THIN, SALLOW FACED AND SUBDUED, WERE GIVEN AN EMOTIONAL GREETING BY THE LARGE GATHERING OF GVN OFFICIALS AT THE AIRPORT, ESCORTED TO A RECEPTION CENTER WHERE THEY WERE ISSUED NEW FATIGUES AND GVN FLAGS, AND THEN HELPED ON BOARD MILITARY TRUCKS WAITING TO TAKE THEM INTO QUANG NGAI CITY. MOST SEEMED IN FAIR HEALTH AND SPIRITS, THOUGH A FEW HAD TO BE ASSISTED IN ORDER TO WALK. THREE MORE SORTIES OF 50 PRISONERS EACH ARRIVED IN REGULAR FORTY-FIVE MINUTE INTERVALS, THE LAST LANDING SHORTLY BEFORE 1600 HOURS.

4. THOUSANDS OF QUANG NGAI RESIDENTS, MANY OF THEM HOPEFUL RELATIVES AND FRIENDS OF CAPTURED OR MISSING SOLDIERS, GATHERED,
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THE FAMALL PARK OPPOSITE THE PROVINCE HEADQUARTERS TO RECEIVE THE RETURNING TROOPS. THE RELEASEES WERE GIVEN MEDICAL TREATMENT AT A TEMPORARY CLINIC, AND THOSE WHO WERE WELL ENOUGH WERE THEN TAKEN

NEXT DOOR TO THE YOUTH CENTER WHERE THEY WERE SERVED LUNCH BY A COTERIE OF WHITE UNIFORMED HIGHSCHOOL GIRLS. WHEN THE LAST GROUP HAD BEEN EXAMINED AND FED, THE POWS WERE GIVEN A BRIEF CEREMONY AND TAKEN BACK TO THE AIRPORT TO BE FLOWN TO DANANG.

5. AMONG THE 97 OFFICERS AND 102 NCOS AND ENLISTED MEN TO BE RELEASED WAS MARINE LIEUTENANT LE DINH QUY, CAPTURED IN 1965. QUY TOLD US/ JMC REPRESENTATIVES AT THE RELEASE SITE THAT HE HAD BEEN HELD IN A POW CAMP IN SOUTHERN NGHIA HANH DISTRICT WHERE AT ONE TIME THERE WERE ALSO TWELVE US POWS WHO WERE LATER TAKEN NORTH. USJMC PERSONNEL WERE PREVENTED BY WELCOMING CEREMONIES FROM OBTAINING COMPLETE DEBRIEFING FROM QUY.

6. UPON RETURNING TO QUANG NGAI AFTER THE COMPLETION OF THE RELEASE, THE GVN/ JMC REPRESENTATIVE PRESENTED ICCS DELEGATION WITH A LETTER PROTESTING THE SHOOTING OF THE POW CHINOOK. THE HUNGARIAN ICCS DELEGATION ACCEPTED THE LETTER, AND THE DELEGATION THEN INSPECTED THE HELICOPTER AND VISITED THE WOUNDED CREWMAN AT THE QUANG NGAI MILITARY HOSPITAL. BECAUSE THE BULLET THAT WOUNDED THE CREWMAN WAS AN M-16 ROUND, THE US AND GVN JMC REPRESENTATIVES WERE INCLINED TO DOUBT THAT THE HUNGARIAN AND POLISH DELEGATES WOULD AGREE TO TAKE ACTION ON THE GVN COMPLAINT.

7. POLOFF COMMENT: THE COMPLETION OF THE PRISONER RELEASE IS TO DATE THE MOST TANGIBLE ASPECT OF THE CEASEFIRE IN QUANG NGAI. NEVERTHELESS, WHILE THERE WAS OBVIOUS ELATION AT HAVING THE POWS HOME, THE THOUGHTS OF MANY LOCAL RESIDENTS WERE CLEARLY FOCUSSED ON THE MANY RVN TROOPS WHO HAVE NOT YET BEEN RELEASED. IN THE EYES OF MANY LOCAL RESIDENTS, THE RELEASE ONLY UNDERScoreD THE IMPERFEC- TIONS AND WEKANESSES OF THE CEASEFIRE ARRANGEMENT AND REINFORCED THE VIEW THAT A FINAL SETTLEMENT IS NOT YET AT HAND. END COMMENT.
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